

# executive summary

Overweight and obesity are associated with chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, stroke, heart disease, arthritis, asthma, and cancer. Additionally, overweight and obesity are associated with an increased risk for mortality/morbidity due to injury. Of special concern is the relatively new finding of risk factors for diabetes and heart disease being seen in children and adolescents; health professionals previously saw type 2 diabetes only in adults.

## How Overweight Are We?

Overweight and obesity have reached nationwide epidemic proportions. The most recent data (2004 BRFSS) show that 60.1 percent of American adults were overweight or obese and 23.4 percent were obese. In Utah the rates are comparable, with 58.4 percent of adults being overweight or obese and 21.0 percent being obese (2004 BRFSS). These rates reflect an increase of 103 percent nationally and an increase of 112 percent in Utah over 14 years. The local health district in Utah with the highest rate of overweight or obesity was Tricounty, and the local health district with the lowest rate was Summit.

The overweight and obesity epidemic is not limited to adults. The most recent data (2003) show that 14.8 percent of American public high school students were at risk of becoming overweight and 12.1 percent were already overweight. In Utah, the rates are slightly lower, with 11.3 percent of Utah public high school students at risk of becoming overweight and 7.0 percent already overweight. The number of overweight Utah teenagers

could fill 410 classrooms. (See Appendix A for definition of terms.)

## Why Are We Overweight?

This increase in average weight for adults and children is attributable to consuming too much food (poor diet) and a decrease in physical activity. In general, the average American is consuming more high-fat foods; is drinking soda instead of milk; is consuming dramatically more cheese; is consuming few fruits and vegetables; is eating more meals/snacks outside of the home; and is moving less.

The number of trips the average American adult takes on foot each year decreased 42 percent between 1975 and 1995. Among American children, walking trips decreased 37 percent in the same time period. Today, only 10 percent of public school students walk to school compared to the majority of students a generation ago. Today, the most common means of transportation to school is by car.

## Nutritional Trends

A national survey showed that the average adult total caloric consumption has increased by 181 calories per day from 1977-78 to 1994-96, which could result in a weight gain of over 18 pounds per year (NHANES). Additionally, the average Utah adult consumed less fruits and vegetables in 2003 compared to 1998 (in 1998, 26.7 percent of Utah adults ate five or more servings of fruits or vegetables per day compared to 20.6 percent in 2003). In general, women ate more fruits and vegetables than men, and obese adults

ate less fruits and vegetables compared to adults at ideal weight.

The same survey showed that average child/adolescent total caloric consumption has increased by 64 calories per day from 1977-78 to 1994-96, which could result in a weight gain of over 6 pounds per year. The Survey showed that only 14 percent of school children ate the recommended amount of fruits, 20 percent ate the recommended amount of vegetables, and 30 percent ate the recommended amount of dairy. The Survey also showed that over 66 percent of children ate more than the recommended amount of saturated fat and total fat. Added sugars, such as those found in soda, contributed to 20 percent of overall caloric intake. In the US, since the 1950s, milk consumption has decreased, while cheese and soda consumption has increased dramatically.

### Physical Activity Trends

Although Utah is ranked third in the nation for adults getting the recommended amount of physical activity, 44.5 percent do not get the recommended amount. This did not differ by gender, though, as expected, older adults were less active compared to younger adults. Additionally, adults tended to watch a lot of television (29 hours per week for the average American man and 34 hours a week for the average American woman).

In 2003, 24.8 percent of Utah public high school students did not get the recommended amount of physical activity. This rate has remained relatively unchanged since 1999 and, regardless of gender, as the child gets older they engage in less physical activity. Increased media use, including television viewing, computer use, and video games, is

speculated to have resulted in increased weight. About 38.2 percent of Utah public high school students watch three or more hours of television per day on an average school day, and a national survey found that 56 percent of children eight to 16 years of age have a television in their bedroom

### Opportunities for Action

What are the opportunities for action? The U.S. Surgeon General, in the 2001 Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity, presents five overarching principles that Utah can adopt:

- Promote the recognition of overweight and obesity as major public health problems.
- Assist Americans in balancing healthful eating with regular physical activity to achieve and maintain a healthy or healthier body weight.
- Identify effective culturally appropriate interventions to prevent and treat overweight and obesity.
- Encourage environmental changes that help prevent overweight and obesity.
- Develop and enhance public-private partnerships to help implement this vision.

While, for the most part, overweight and obesity are a result of individual behaviors and choices, the environments in which we live shape those behaviors and choices. More than ever, we are challenged throughout the day to make healthy food and physical activity choices in environments that are not supportive. And, we now know the critical link between those choices and our collective future health and well-being.

Our *families, communities, schools, worksites, health care delivery systems, and the mass media*, to a large extent, define our environments. Therefore, these are the settings where we must identify opportunities for change, remove barriers to good health, and promote choices that support good nutrition and regular physical activity. Collaboration among and between people and organizations will multiply the efforts to improve weight management by individuals and for the entire population.

It is also critical that monitoring and reporting of indicators related to overweight and obesity be continued and refined. Through these efforts, we will be able to focus resources and define successes.

Now is the time for Utah's leaders, in all sectors, to work together to develop a focused, consistent, and coordinated approach that will create a culture and environment in Utah that makes the healthy choice the easy choice.